



A PAC GUIDE TO PEER RESEARCH AND SOCIAL ACTION ON ISSUES RELATED TO YOUTH VIOLENCE

**LEARNING FROM THE PEER ACTION
COLLECTIVE**

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All quotes are from peer researchers unless otherwise stated. In order to protect anonymity, we have not reported age, ethnicity, gender and location.

INTRODUCTION

The Peer Action Collective (PAC) is a £5.2 million programme, which aims to give young people the chance to make their communities safer, fairer places to live. It is funded by the Youth Endowment Fund, the #iwill Fund (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) and the Co-op Group.

PAC was set up in 2021 to create a network of young people resourced to lead research and take action on issues related to youth violence. They worked in 10 areas of England and Wales, each supported by a Delivery Partnership.

The University of Central Lancashire's Centre for Children and Young People's Participation, and associates from the University of East London, collaborated with this network, as **learning partners**, to learn from and share experiences and cocreate resources¹. We provided a guide developed from [previous research](#), at the beginning of PAC. This guide reports on what was learned together during PAC on how to support young people to do peer research and social action on issues related to youth violence².

The Young Foundation and UK Youth are PAC **national partners** - they helped to set up the network, design peer research training, support fieldwork and analyse the research that young people produced.

This report outlines learning in relation to:

1. Network Set Up
2. Delivery Partnership Set Up
3. Induction and Transitions
4. Co-Identifying and Working Towards Achievable Goals
5. Building and Sustaining Collaborative and Cushioning Relationships

In each section there are six essential lessons learned about establishing and maintaining effective collaborations. There are also boxes on strategies for recruitment of peer researchers, research participants and changemakers.

The common themes across all sections include the importance of:

¹ See www.UCanMakeChange2.org/advice for cocreated resources

² Peer Researchers (PRs) completed a survey (129/17) completed at the beginning, 88 middle and 59 at the end of the project). 178 changemakers completed a survey towards the end of their engagement. 21 young people completed an early exit survey. PRs attended repeat reflective focus groups in every DP (online and face to face). A sample of young people (26), including young people who were less vocal in group situations, were interviewed in the last two months of the programme. 24 young people took part in a creative evaluation activity at the closing event. Delivery partner coordination staff engaged in monthly repeat interviews.

- Building collaborations with a wide range of stakeholders and specialists – and ensuring that young people remain at the centre of deciding how these connections and skills are used.
- Creating flat and open spaces of communication and collaboration in which it is safe to name and resolve difficulties – and avoiding repeated misunderstandings of youth, violence and intersecting discriminations.
- Planning together towards cocreated goals – and reviewing these to ensure they are achievable.
- Nurturing and sustaining relationships of care between young people, delivery partners, national programmes and stakeholders – and managing risks to seek transformational change.

1. NETWORK SET UP

This section of the report features six essential elements to consider for programme level planning in a broad collective of Peer Research/ Social Action partnership/collaboration focused on youth violence. In our model, this network supports delivery partners (DPs) and peer researchers who work in localities.

1.1 Set up a group of young people to guide delivery of the programme and reflect on who else to involve

Create a programme steering group

Young people who have been involved in past research projects have invaluable insights into how a research and social action could be run effectively. They can provide insight into accessible and inclusive approaches to doing all of the other tasks listed in this network set up section.

Reflect on the target population

There are tensions between the inclusive aims of a programme (seeking to include young people who face discrimination and who may not yet have found suitable learning and employment opportunities) and the output aims (rigorous research and impactful social action across broad

geographical locations on sensitive subjects within tight timescales). Young people who have direct experience of youth violence will have enormous insights that can guide social action and research. Sufficient time and resources need to be built into the programme to enable their safe and meaningful recruitment, ongoing engagement, and subsequent successful transition out of the programme into other opportunities.

1.2 Adopt an action and reflection cycle approach to peer research and social action

Some of the sensitivities in working with marginalised young people on issues related to violence have been well documented in other times and places (see PAC Rapid Review). In PAC we gathered more evidence of what can help:

- Members of research collectives need to be able to talk about their own relationships to violence in safe ways.
- Reflecting on personal experiences of violence from the start can help young people and adults unpick and critique their underlying assumptions.
- New insights about violence are gathered from doing social action.
- Reflecting on personal and group experiences and taking action on these together can be a good starting point for guiding the focus of further research and social action.
- Deep understanding is built when there are cycles of *learn, plan, act, reflect*.

This cyclical approach to reflection and action can be a way in which DPs and peer researchers come to know and trust each other, to understand lived conditions and issues of violence locally and to identify and try out potential strategies for change that might address underlying causes³.

1.3 Cocreate communication spaces and information that are open to all

³ See Rapid Review for further details of this Frierean approach <https://clou.uclan.ac.uk/39353/>

Peer researchers, delivery partners and national partners value direct communication

Young people have repeatedly asked for a single space in which to find all the advice and other material that they need to guide their journeys. Delivery partners echoed this request, also requesting the facilitation throughout the programme of spaces which enable face to face communication between peer researchers (supported by delivery partner leads) from different geographical locations. The national partner has also asked for direct communication opportunities with young people. Some of this requires planning at a programme level and may include provision of a central platform (e.g. Teams, Recollective etc). Avoid creation of spaces that are open to some members of the collective only, as this restricts information flow.

Share and create resources to provide accessible guidance

Lots has been learned from PAC so far, and resources have been cocreated with peer researchers and shared between delivery partner organisations. Sharing resources could start with reviewing and distributing the already existing cocreated guidance coproduced with peer researchers and located on the UCMC2 website, as well as documents that delivery partners will share. Further guidance that would be useful includes:

- A one-page outline of the aims of the programme, what decisions can be made by peer researchers, what decisions have to be taken centrally by YEF and what decisions can be made collaboratively through dialogue.
- A one page account of the minimum monitoring and evaluation expectations and targets of the programme, as well as the support that is available to facilitate reporting
- A short information booklet on models, policies and plans to guide team structures, roles, timelines and approaches to safety planning.
- A briefing on what is already known about what works in violence reduction interventions and social action.
- An outline of example of different forms of social action (including advocating and acting from personal experiences and using social research to inform social action).
- Guidance for peer researchers on how the data they have cocreated will be stored, who it can be used by and how, as well as how they can access it for future research and activism.
- Information about any opportunities for peer researchers that will continue beyond the end of the programme.

1.4 Plan for residential and national networking opportunities for partner organisations and peer researchers

Identify funding and time for residential and national networking for DPs and for peer researchers. Support peer researchers and DPs to codesign and run the events in the ways they feel would best meet their needs. Prioritise opportunities for national face to face events early in the programme.

In person events (including the launch event, the summer school and the conference) provided the peer researchers with the opportunity to meet and learn from other peer researchers across the country. They gave peer researchers a valued sense of connection to the national programme. They felt re-assured that peer researchers from the other delivery partners had experienced similar frustrations, challenges, anxieties, and pressures. There is acknowledgement that the programme networks would have been stronger if more meetings were face to face and included more opportunities for informal conversations and social activities.

The in-person events enabled the peer researchers to learn the confidence to communicate in larger groups, demonstrate their skills and talents and articulate some of the lessons learned, and to share possible strategies that could be used to address the forms of violence affecting young people in their own areas.

“ I feel like the connection with the PAC as a whole came more towards the end. But that meeting in person in the summer, that made a big difference. Yeah, a massive difference.

Online forums also provided some of these opportunities, but there is a feeling that these would have been more effective if young people had met face to face first.

1.5 Cocreate a light touch evaluation

Light touch Monitoring and Evaluation might be built into quarterly funding reporting mechanisms. It might also include upfront support to develop and coordinate internal partner organisations systems so that they can feed data into programme reporting. It would be beneficial to include:

- Cocreated bespoke timelines for each group's social action and research, ensuring equal recognition of all cultural festivals in principle and practice.
- Codevelop a simple (ten item) measure that young people complete with their support person as soon as they join the programme and when they leave.
- A range of creative ways in which young people can choose to share their own stories and coordinate these to meet the needs for public outputs and ongoing reflection. This could include audio recording in a private discussion pod at shared events and other activities created by and for young people.
- Stakeholder feedback surveys available for on-line completion.

1.6 Cocreate a data security and ethics approval process

Create diverse but secure spaces for data collection and storage

Methods for data collection are best chosen according to research questions, as well as what will make for the most useful conversations with the people peer researchers wish to learn from. There are benefits and costs to using one digital tool to collect data. A digital tool can be used to generate a large central bank of data nationally but it will not suit all research situations and topics. Alternatively, a range of digital tools could be identified to enable safe storage and collation of secure data and creative engagement. For example, a secure shared drive and data collection apps that feed into this.

Make ethical approval process of direct and supportive dialogue

Ethical approval is a process for ensuring that potential participants have the information they need to make informed decisions, and for limiting any

risks of harm. Peer researchers can experience ethical approval as a way in which adults take control of their research project and challenge their ideas. Creating an ethical approval process that is based on direct conversation between the research team and the ethics board helps young people maintain a sense of control. Involving young people in the ethical approval process can also help, as can providing support around developing simple and clear information sheets and methods advice.

2. SETTING UP A PEER RESEARCH & SOCIAL ACTION PARTNERSHIP

This section of the report features six essential areas to consider for the delivery level organizations working in localities to set up a Peer Research/Social Action partnership/collaboration focused on youth violence. In our model, these collaborations go on to recruit young people as peer researchers.

2.1 The size and composition of effective partnerships/collaborations

The size and composition of the 'consortium' and the hours that DP staff must have to support Peer researchers are important considerations. It is important to establish links: between DP organisations and any policymaking stakeholders with responsibilities that connect to youth violence in any way; with any sources of specialist skills in research and social action and transcription (inside or outside of the consortium). It may also be useful to recruit a group of young people as a local steering group.

Structures to support collaboration within a consortium

It is important to establish a purposeful and well-coordinated partnership that is focused, but also committed to innovation throughout the process, and able to provide a range of types of support (e.g., employment advice, mentoring, trauma informed, pastoral and wellbeing support, research skills development, social action skills development). This approach will mitigate risks and maximise opportunities for peer researchers investigating aspects of youth violence. The delivery model should be flexible to inclusively involve the different voices of the peer researchers and changemakers throughout the process, including at set up. The consortium also needs to collectively agree and sign up to a shared understanding of meaningful youth voice:

“ and how you hold yourself accountable to it as a partnership (DP)

Regular meetings (e.g. monthly) with all organisations involved in a consortium helps with information flow and to troubleshoot any problems. These are meeting for staff supporting DPs and are in addition to meetings with peer researchers themselves. Where these meetings did not take place there was some concern.

“ I felt like there's been an assumption that, well THIS HOST is fine because she knows what she is doing and then we've had no engagement and then it kind of looks like I'm not doing my job because I haven't been engaged ... but I've just sort of been left to my own devices and so I found that quite tricky ... So I think maybe like I would definitely maybe monthly like formal meetings check-ins and then kind of informal catch-ups in between ...Just to touch base and say what everyone was doing and where everyone was at.

But there was also a call for all organisations to have sufficient funded staff time to make attendance at these feasible.

Provide colearning opportunities and access to specialist skills (e.g. in research and social action)

Mapping, recruiting, sharing best practice, and unlocking assets from across the consortium is key to the set-up phase. Identifying which of the essential competences the team already has (e.g., M&E, collaborative research with young people on sensitive issues, social action, emotional and practical support, safeguarding, trauma informed approaches and youth work) and where additional support may be needed with certain tasks, supports the smooth implementation of peer research. Once the team is assembled, it helps if everyone knows their roles and responsibilities, and where/how additional support can be secured and are sufficiently resourced to fulfil roles. Teams should plan for how they will

grow and change over time (e.g. many DPs recruited additional support for accessing and working with changemakers).

A peer-led project does not require that all tasks are carried out by young people. The important issue to understand is who is labouring for whom. In other words, are support tasks being taken on by wider staff in ways that ensure that these staff are following PR's lead or direction? This can enable peer researchers to make the most of the time they have available to work on the project to ensure that their unique perspectives and experiences guide things like the questions that are asked, the methods that are used, the relationships that are established and the meanings that are drawn from data analysis.

Building networks and relationships

The social action and research goals of peer research are supported when, from the start, the consortium maps existing access to gatekeepers and stakeholders, and leverages further support, rather than leaving this to young people. Identifying from the start who can enable access to potential research participants and to policy makers means that these networks can be put in the hands of peer researchers from the start, which can increase their opportunities to influence the systems in which they are working. Helping peer researchers to have discussions with service directors and policy makers from the start can enable them to steadily build experience of engaging and lobbying decision makers and build the relationships of trust between them. As one peer researcher described, this means getting people involved from the start who will support the process and use the results:

“ Maybe if it's like a university that's interested in this project, then they can go “Oh OK with all this data we can incorporate into our education” or something like that. ... Just get other people in the room.

2.2 Overcoming and working with physical geography

The ambition to maximise the impact of peer research and social action by working across large geographical areas has to be balanced with practicality of what can be meaningfully achieved on an available budget. Coming to know other young people in person appears to be particularly important for peer researchers who valued opportunities to meet with others. Whilst some of this can be provided by programme level networking already described the deeper relationships that young people established were with their local groups and these strong local peer support mechanisms are key to a positive experience and to success.

Being mindful of the role physical geography can play in connecting the peer researchers

An understanding of the role physical geography plays, can serve to compound and/or enrich insights into how youth violence is understood and experienced. Therefore, geographical considerations should be considered at the outset and solutions found to overcome any barriers to building connections (e.g., timetabled in person or blended whole group meetings), and/or deconstructed when it serves as a research theme (e.g., social deprivation scale).

Design a structure that ensures young people can physically come together in person easily

It was effective to be working on a common project as part of a team with young people.

“ I was kinda like “ohh I could maybe handle doing stuff myself”, but I realized that having like a team is a little bit more helpful since I have like a ton of ideas. It's just the way I elaborate them or handle them isn't the same.

Working with peer researchers and changemakers across more than four localities reduces the opportunities for peer support and complicates communication flow within the consortium. Young people may be successfully embedded in multiple organisations within one locality, as long as they can physically get together easily. Young people may feel taken more seriously as colleagues if coming together focuses on work first and then some fun activities arise out of this, rather than coming together with recreation as the main focus. This is an important balance to plan on striking as informal interaction can help build teams.

The proximity of the support worker to peer researchers matters. The ability of staff to supervise and rapidly respond to fieldwork concerns is essential.

2.3 Too much research, or not enough?

Reflecting on broad understandings of research and social action can help consortium frame their applications for funding and help create fertile ground for peer researchers projects.

Research design should work backwards from an answerable research question

A well-defined research question that can evidence a gap in knowledge and can drive social action is more likely to achieve impact than multiple research projects requiring high level of coordination between PR sites, dispersed energy, lacking a unified focus, and producing superficial findings. Research design should be made as simple as possible to achieve an answerable question.

Social action requires collective action and momentum

If a consortium is working across multiple localities it is helpful to be establishing and embedding coordinating mechanisms across all the geographical areas. This can help coordinate action with, for example police forces. So the learning from and example of use of findings in one police force can be used to lobby for change in another.

Consideration what research questions might motivate partners and stakeholders

Where the goal is research informed social action it can help to build understanding of opportunities for change and consensus around a specific research question or a set of interconnected questions before research commences. This can help peer researchers prioritise which of their concerns they want to work on by knowing what staff capabilities and/or the assets partners bring to the partnership/collaboration and how these could be might be used to ensure the research is as impactful as possible. Peer researchers may also choose research which does not engage with current opportunities for change, but at least by providing information and networks through which young people can be familiarised

with these opportunities they can make informed decisions about whether to pursue harder or easier goals for change.

2.4 Seeing the space of peer research as the centre

Remaining true to the principle and ethos of Peer Research. Seeing young people as the centre of research and social action process, which requires collaboration, co-production and shared decision making in all stages of the research and social action processes. It also requires that the peer researcher group itself is conceptualised as the centre. That is, the space to which all information, support and networks should be brought and where all decisions should be taken. This has practical implications for how to organise working structures.

Providing emotional and practical support within the research setting

Peer researchers felt well supported when members of staff who provided them with pastoral support were also present in the spaces of designing and delivering the research. This helped pastoral support staff understand the challenges that young people were facing in their work, and helped them spot when young people had been triggered or struggled, without demanding that young people have to reach out and request support. These relationships in which help can be sought develop over time as people work together:

“ I think my connection with STAFF has gotten a lot better. I never used to like I guess wouldn't talk, Well, not pretty much seek help from them, but over the years I would work together, I've sort of learned to rely on them and sort of ask them for help when I needed it, and just talk a bit more to them

Drawing in stakeholders and collaborators

Consider how stakeholders can be brought into the peer researcher's space rather than young people just presenting at meetings. Bringing

stakeholders into these spaces can change the way that they behave and make it more likely for them to change attitudes and actions.

Bringing in research expertise

Plan for how staff members who know how to do research or external advisors can be brought into the local collective to model good practice or help to demystify the research processes. In six DPs, DPs and peer researchers described the value of learning through opportunities to practice, rather than through training (e.g., learning by doing). For example, one PR described having the opportunity to practice a complete mini research and social action project in the first week of his employment and had found this helped his understanding of what the whole process should look like at a larger scale. More about learning together about research is in a separate report.

2.5 Time and timescales

Staff working with peer researchers need to have time to work in the evening and weekends and, as already mentioned, to attend all meetings. Peer researchers need to feel that there is some parity in how hours are allocated.

Awareness of young people's rhythm as it relates to time

Peer researchers/Changemakers will have differing weekly, termly and annual schedules often out of their control, which can impact of their ability to participate in the project periodically/momentarily.

“ I would have gotten like a ton more interviews if it was before A level exams 'cause I could have talked to more people in my year... social action it would have been... great if it was like summer holidays as well since kids are more likely to be willing to like see something like unique and be like, “Oh, what's happening I don't have school in the afternoon anymore. Let me go check it out.

Many young people are used to having long breaks from work as summer holidays, and building in a significant break may be beneficial for some

peer researchers, especially those employed for the first time. Other young people may benefit from opportunities to engage in social action during the summer.

Accept that individual peer researchers will have different levels of interest in different elements of the research

Develop employment structure and processes which allow for shared negotiation of tasks and the difficulty of balancing different roles (e.g., youth worker and peer researcher, or student and peer researcher) and research responsibilities.

Build in time for slippage in the processes

Consider the length of time needed to prep, undertake, and review/reflect on key aspects of the research/social action process. YP's need to have time to switch between tasks cognitively. Where time for orientation was not taken one DP noted that, on reflection, they would have benefited from spending more time on 'desk based' research to understand what is going on locally. Challenges related to generating the scale and depth of data required by their targets within the timeframe allocated may arise. The time frame for the whole project needs to be sensitive to young people's rhythms and academic and cultural calendars. This might mean cocreating with peer researchers a timeline for research and social action activities (see section 3.4) mindfully around transition and bottleneck points where progress is dependent upon dialogue, reflection and building in-depth understanding. It also means thinking through how to provide the right kind of resources to young people at the times anticipated in national timelines (see section 1).

2.6 Recognising that this is research on violence

Working with young people on issues related to violence means that consortiums have to consider how they conceive of violence, what resources and experiences they have that will keep young people safe, and how to minimise violence tourism. That is, there is an implicit assumption

that peer researchers are *insiders* and intrinsically understand and connect with the experiences of other young people because they are of a similar age. However, the complexities of class, sexuality, race, gender, social capital, communities of (not) belonging, space and place need further exploration for a youth violence project to have genuine credibility. And there is need to ensure that the research and social action conducted with their support can avoid dropping into communities to identify problems and then leaving with just the data and no commitment to longer term engagement.

Consider being guided by communities experiencing violence in terms of research focus

This can mean speaking with people, trying to identify what might be misconceptions in media and local messages about where violence is happening and with whom, recruiting peer researchers and changemakers from affected areas or communities. Adopting a trauma-informed approach here will serve as a protective factor for the peer researchers and changemakers. Peer researchers and changemakers are at heightend risk of traumatisation or re-traumatisation from talking, reading and listening to stories of youth violence.

Access local sources of information to understand what youth violence looks like in the local areas.

Do background research - or a literature review - delving deep into the research theme/topic before you make any key decisions on research questions/design. You should be looking for gaps in local knowledge into youth violence.

Build in opportunities for YP to establish individual and group understanding around youth violence

It can help to establish mechanisms, systems and forums to effectively share new insights and new understanding throughout the process. Consider how best to minimise risk during all stages of the research process and especially during the fieldwork phase that goes beyond your safeguarding policy and procedure. For example, how safe is it to place a mobile phone in the young researcher's hand to collect data on the street when investigating street crime among young people.

How to recruit Peer Researchers ...

- Send out flyers and emails to a wide range of organisations in target communities
- Make calls and visit venues
- Find young people known to youth offending teams or the police and building relationships with them, then introducing the PAC opportunity
- Have conversations with satellite organisations about how they would be able to recruit or finding new organisations where they can recruit from.
- Reach out through youth workers known to and trusted by target recruitment populations
- Existing peer researchers reach out through their networks
- Take time
- Build up trust with young people growing up in local areas affected by poverty to reach those that others may find 'hard to reach'.
- Recruit from your known networks of young people

3. INDUCTION AND PLANNING FOR TRANSITIONS

This section of the report features six essential areas to consider for the delivery level organizations working in localities as they recruit young people to a Peer Research/Social Action partnership/collaboration focused on youth violence. In our model, young people are employed in roles as peer researchers for a time limited period.

3.1 Explore the balance between young people's leadership in a participation project and the expectations of employees and workplans

Explore how this project is different to previous participation and employment opportunities

Some DPs recruited peer researchers that were known to DPs (active in their agency/ organisation before the commencement of this project and perceived to have the requisite experience or interest necessary to learn and engage in what was a complex research project). For them, it was useful to contrast this new role of leading participatory activities, rather than taking part. And for everyone it was helpful to think about what might be different about this job, compared with others.

Create a sense of support, acknowledging and celebrating intersectional differences

It helps if people are feeling that they are all on a journey together to explore and develop co-participatory research and feeling like that can lead to decision making. They also valued being treated as employees, who have clear and achievable expectations around working practices, targets, support, time off and flexibility. There are also some things that cannot be done due to organisational policies and safeguarding needs, as this young person expressed:

“ Don't know if it's safeguarding, for whatever reason, like there's certain things that we can't do because we work

for this organisation, which is sometimes quite frustrating

“ We want not like direct heavy guidance, but just a little bit of you know, someone behind us to help us keep on track and like a helping hand in the background, like it's always there. We need it like that.

Put all of these competing aims and expectations on the table for discussion

This will help to develop shared understandings of how to work as a collective to agree and achieve tasks. Take time to establish clear expectations around the balance of this being a young person led participation project versus it being a job in relation to which other people make the decisions.

“ trust the process ...if we rushed we would not have credibility (DP)

3.2 Create collectives in which people can reflect, challenge and learn together

Recruit to reflect the intersectional demography of children and young people in a region

This can build into the collective the benefits of intersectionally diverse team in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class. Recruitment of peer researchers with the skills and personal experiences that enable them to authentically engage with children and young people who lived in communities that experienced, committed and resisted acts of violence was also useful. But to enable a diverse team to collaborate effectively it is important to acknowledge and explore personal experiences and concerns. Some recruited peer researchers were predominantly Black and

Minority ethnic young people as they had a lived experience and commitment to engage in exploring and addressing the issues of race, class, space and violence. Other DPs actively sought children and young people as peer researchers who had experienced and/or committed violent offences and had been formally through the criminal justice system and engaged with Child and Youth Justice Teams.

DPs and peer researchers codevelop strategies to engage with the some of the most alienated and marginalised communities of children

A lot of this was about ensuring young people have the time they need. The support needed by peer researchers was compounded by the YEF projects commencing when the country was in lockdown and there was no opportunity for peer researchers, many of whom did not know each other, to meet and develop working relationships, trust and co-operation. Further, the children and young people employed as peer researchers were of different ages, and intersectional identities, in terms of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Some peer researchers felt anxious throughout the period of the projects, although almost all of them grew in confidence as their project developed.

Create spaces and process that support, safeguard and enable peer researchers to learn and grow, to feel safe, to air and resolve differences and to develop confidence

The potential diversity of experience means there is a need to work at individual's pace and embrace diversity in order to undertake the research and social action in a meaningful way. In these spaces it is important to challenge misconceptions. For instance, where there was a perception that violence by children and young people were committed by Black young people on white children. In practice, this sometimes involved a move from 'storming' to 'performing' through developing understanding of each other and sensitive verbal and non-verbal communication skills. One group created safe space cards to help signal their discomfort or needs to each other. This peer researcher described the point she thought groups should get to:

“ Like anything could happen, and I feel like we'd all still come out the other side. I think that's because we've all

respect each other's boundaries, we all understand. everyone's, like, body language.

“ Again, teamwork as well as support and encouragement from both DP coordinators and each other as Peer Researchers. Even when we have faced obstacles, we have worked together constructively to overcome them rather than focusing on what may have been holding us back.

Be aware of the potential for discord when creating diverse structures

There were mixed views from young people about the role of hierarchies between peer researchers who took on lead roles and supervised mini teams. Some felt this aided communication and facilitated completion of tasks. Others felt these exacerbated inequalities (e.g. related to gender) and could lead to conflict.

3.3 Establish flat, secure and accessible modes of communication and support

Regular meetings facilitated and structured to support the peer researchers to get the most from the experience

This space clearly had formal and informal aspects to it. It had a structure that focussed on activities and programme issues, but also a form which supported peers getting to know each other *“as friends’ and this was highly valued.”*

This worked better when peer researchers were not widely dispersed geographically (where meeting up together was a challenge). Where Peer researchers were dispersed geographically use was made of digital technology for virtual meet ups, although this was not preferred or seen as ideal.

Effective communication strategies include:

- In person meetings when there was clarity about the purpose of the meeting and a sense that the necessary group of people were being brought together.
- Direct communication with all staff in the delivery partnership, rather than the need to send messages up or down communication hierarchies.
- Avoiding communicating with some but not all (due to being full time and part-time).

“ there's a lot of miscommunication because people who are only here on Tuesdays and Fridays. It can get scrambled because [part timers] had like 3 days of not being in the conversation and so [full timers] are going “Well. We discussed this on Tuesday.”

- Using WhatsApp groups, Instagram, emails, link trees and google drives for some aspect of sharing project information.
- Use of social media, WhatsApp, Instagram, podcasts and local media to communicate findings of research and the social action projects that they had initiated.

The central provision of a secure platform was requested on multiple occasions (see 1.3) and this might prevent some of the data security risks that are involved in using multiple platforms.

3.4 Explore how to cocreate plans for a project as a whole

Ensure that induction includes information about how funding for peer research is attached to expectations about focus and targets

For many young people (and adults) with little research or social action experience, targets can feel daunting but there are almost always some

expectations attached to funding. Many peer researchers, irrespective of their age, education and skill set experienced a feeling of imposter syndrome at some point during the course of the project:

“ I don't know what the solution is, but yeah, it's sometimes did get quite overwhelming. The amount we had to do and the targets we had to hit in, like the time that we had.

To help young people settle into the role of peer researchers make the funded tasks as clear and concrete (not abstract) as possible

Explore the question of whether it is possible to affect any tangible change to address youth violence in their communities within the set timescales. This means reflecting on the fact that violence is so embedded in the most traumatised children and young people and the most alienated communities, residing the places that were precarious and like *war zones*.

Understand from the start a rough picture of the whole project timeline

A rough picture helps understand scale, but make sure it is clear that there is space for peer researchers to adjust some plans for as the work develops. Where there is less structure in planning peer researchers and DPs seemed to struggle more with the tasks, the deadlines, and the expected outputs for instance, the delivery of research training, interviewing a certain number of young people, developing change agents and social action projects.

Explain that this will be a process, in which they will learn and try things out one step at a time

Where a provisional project outline is set, peer researchers could more easily co-create research projects which was best achieved by focusing on one task at a time, step by step and making incremental progress. Include other children and young people about what issues are important in their communities, what methods work to explore these and which young people it is useful to hear more from.

Outline to peer researchers how they will be able to cocreate research projects into social action projects

This can be achieved by reflecting on four key signifiers of their own and other young people's experience:

- Themes that emerged from their co-creative research,
- Understandings of children and young people's challenges and experiences in their communities,
- Intersectional biographical experiences that can inspire social action, and
- National and local opportunities regarding social action and violence.

3.5 Set up ways for young people to learn about being an employee

Provide ongoing clarity about roles

Peer researchers valued being entrusted with the roles and expectations of being an employee. At an individual level different young people have different histories. This means that partner organisations need to tailor supportive, facilitative and encouraging relationships to suit each peer researcher to engage, lead research and inform social action.

It helps when DPs and peer researchers establish clearly with each other:

- when they are expected to be present in meetings online, or in person in the building
- a culture of encouraging co-participation, and expectations about contributing to forums for ideas and planning
- clear weekly and monthly tasks/ objectives that it was reasonable for each PR to meet individually and as a group
- roles and tasks within the PR team (that match with young people's personal areas of expertise and their time available)
- setting tasks according to hours employed, competencies and working contexts

Safeguarding, psycho-social and practical welfare of researchers

Where young people felt supported to learn and grow as employees there was a clear focus by different DPs on making sure that peer researchers were feeling okay.

“ I mean we had a big focus on like well-being like throughout the entire thing.

This involved providing practical and emotional support for peer researchers across a range of social welfare and regarding mental health and counselling, which included experiencing threatening physical and emotional situations. Others had become homeless during the employment period. Some peer researchers needed support in the role as employees in the DP and had to learn the discipline and skills expected of paid employment and the task of peer research involves a lot of emotional labour.

Young people's success in maintaining employment in these circumstances was achieved by DPs:

- having regular meetings with peer researchers to ensure that safeguarding their wellbeing was a constant priority
- encouraging peer researchers to share in a group and individual settings how to learn to behave as an employee
- investment in individualised support, to respond to any difficult personal circumstances that peer researchers were experiencing
- organising additional team activities if needed to keep up morale
- workshops covering independent living skills, money management, CV skills, interview skills

These meetings had the dual effect of focusing on the performance and behaviour of peer researchers as employees, with key expectations. But, also, provided the opportunity for peer researchers to articulate on an individual and group basis with their peers, how they felt about their role as an employee, and expectations around how to perform and behave with their peer and line managers.

Sometime difficult discussions are needed with peer researcher employees

Despite provision of support, responsibilities are sometimes not fulfilled. Peer researchers who had talked to us after experiencing these discussions about the expectations of their role tended to be positive about the clarity they had been given. We are aware, however, that we will not have spoken to some of the RPs who may be less happy about this process. For DPs, the boundary drawing was also difficult in some cases, as organisations who pride themselves on being youth led, some were upset at having to come in and be more like heavy-handed bosses.

The key strategy here is to **ensure such conversations are managed supportively:**

“ Honestly, the support from line managers, any questions we have she will answer them straight away as soon as possible.

“ they're very very supportive and helpful.

“ (Line managers) It's giving me confidence in knowing that I am moving in the right direction, and it also just makes sure that I'm doing everything as good as I can so I know that I'm at the right stage or I'm doing things correctly.

3.6 Enable young people to identify personal goals within and on leaving the programme

Provide individual personal and professional support through DP project coordinators, shaped and chosen by young people to facilitates their development, personal growth and confidence

“ Our line managers being supportive and stuff, but also the one-to-one meetings that we have with our line

managers. We really have a moment to talk about how they can help us progress how and what issues we have, how we're doing overall in general, outside of being a peer researcher as well."

Many peer researchers felt that the opportunity to participate in PAC was one of, if not the, most transformational, and validating experience of their lives. They now understood the value of their life experience and the skills and knowledge that they have developed and could enhance further.

At induction, share information on this potential for personal transformation

This might support young people to identify personal goals and routes onward from the programme, from the beginning of their engagement. For some young people this involved identifying and gaining youth work accreditation alongside peer research training, as their career goals were to work in the youth sector.

To build in opportunities for young people's personal development and eventual transition out of the programme from induction onwards it helps to introduce young people to:

- Opportunities to relevant visits to a university to learn about the current and future learning opportunities it could provide and to enable them to gain accreditation through local FE or HE collaborations

" We learned about strategies for social action from people who've used research for action. And it involved them learning about university and thinking about what their own future routes ... And it meant that they met the former Children's Commissioner and she made a commitment to them to help them take their research and findings forward through their networks. (DP)

- Links between the themes and activities in the peer researchers' projects and learning modules, for instance, anti-social behaviour, radicalisation, anti-bullying, e -safety and mental health first aid. One DP had formalised the learning of the peer researchers first aid and digital PR work.

- Reflection on their personal journey as it unfolds within the project, returning to (and if necessary, revise) any personal goals set at the point of induction.
- The fact that they may be 'taken out of their comfort zone' and that they can choose when these moments happen and how they respond – by asking for additional support or choosing to engage with the challenge.

“ Like, I'm quite proud of myself, but I, you know, I've stuck with it even through those difficult moments. And I kind of kept going through it and yeah, like I said, like it has, there has been ups and downs. But I think overall like I'm really glad that I've done it, and I think there is naturally some anxiety there for when it ends, 'cause it's like quite uncertainty of like what's gonna happen after you know. But I think overall it's been a good experience for me.

- Opportunities to continue to do volunteering or paid (youth) work with partner organisations to bridge the gap between PAC and future education and training opportunities and to provide ongoing support

How to recruit Research Participants...

- Young people reach out through your own networks
- Link with children and young people who are already involved with host organisations
- Visit new organisations and building relationships
- Outreach on streets and at stations (where people are waiting not moving and with appropriate consent)
- Offer creative and educational workshops to schools and community groups
- Attend events and running stalls
- Create largescale events and engagement activities
- Create and share videos and using social media
- Use posters and leaflets
- Offer merchandise and other incentives
- Offer changemaker work experience
- Offer budgets which changemakers can direct
- Recruit changemakers who were Research Participants
- Recruit through the networks and time of a broad range of DP staff (rather than peer researchers shouldering all of this responsibility).
- Use energisers and creativity to engage

4. CO-IDENTIFYING AND WORKING TOWARDS ACHIEVABLE GOALS

This section of the report features five essential areas to consider for the research collectives working in localities as they support young people in a Peer Research/Social Action partnership/collaboration focused on youth violence to explore and decide on the focus of their work. In our model, young people have some expectations set by funders, but these may be open to negotiation.

4.1 Negotiate a research focus and avoid being over ambitious

Develop strategies for sharing tasks and maintaining enthusiasm throughout the process

Accept that there will be difficult phases in the process and find ways to manage stress during pinch points and renegotiate deadlines where necessary. In PAC regular team meetings, operate as a vital space which helps to maintain personal and professional motivation. Important tasks include shared negotiation of actions, discussing weekly priorities, the focus of research, the distribution of tasks, as well as ensuring equitable opportunities for peer researchers.

Ensure that all peer researchers feel listened to and avoid the development of hierarchy and cliques

Differences in roles can lead some people to feel marginalized in terms of decision making and opportunities, sometimes on the basis of age, experience or other things. DPs and peer researchers will benefit from establishing a set of values and principles (ideally written down) early in the process which can inform decision making and management processes. This can help ensure that the management of the process of delegating and managing tasks from funders, through DPs, and through peer researchers to changemakers operate on an agreed and transparent basis.

“ The youth workers have been surprised at the level of engagement in the project and participation in project meetings/activities from the peer researchers,

especially when they haven't had their own research ideas taken forward. This was unexpected as they felt that this may be a bit of a barrier to participation and engagement for some as with a large group with differing ideas when own areas of interest might not be taken forward for the research – but this hasn't been the case. (Learning Partner Fieldnotes)

Cocreate ways to maintain enthusiasm, to meet together regularly

This can be a space to negotiate and revisit shared values and decision-making practices and ensure everyone feels listened to. Ensuring that peer researchers retain ownership of their research project is key to this. But this does not mean they have to have their own private project, the process of coming to shared agreed research topic helped young people deepen their understanding of the issues and of each other's experiences.

4.2 Find and create methods that feel comfortable and suitable

Ensure that peer researchers understand and are comfortable using the research methods developed and used in the project

Training can help with this, but research is a craft which develops through time and practice and young people have key knowledge on how to communicate with young people. We find that a cycle of *learn, plan, act, reflect* supports confidence and learning. All social research is messier than it tends to appear in training programmes and textbooks and learning built through experience can be grounded in the actual contexts where peer researchers will be working.

“ Some peer researchers find 1-2-1 interviews difficult and find that some interviewees don't understand the questions. For example, some younger interviewees

(aged 10) are giving one-word answers, which makes the peer researchers panic. (Learning Partner Fieldnotes)

The methods chosen should be suitable to the research questions as well as the target group.

“ [The] questionnaire was too long with 17 questions and was taking 30 minutes”.

“A menu of creative activities would have been useful”
(DP)

DPs and peer researchers should flex methods and approaches to contexts, situations and the needs of those who are participating

“ We also switched to completing mini-interviews, with a hybrid consent form, which was both a physical form and participants giving verbal consent showing a capacity to think in action.

Technology can help with centralizing the capture of data and shared practices (e.g. tagging data), but no one method is perfect for all situations.

“ The transcription function does not pick-up so well on youth vernacular and slang resulting in the loss of meaning in transcripts. As a result, YEF has agreed to transcribe the oral recordings on behalf of our DP.” (DP)

An iterative cycle of *learn, plan, act, reflect* also helps peer researchers build on their learning and know how and when to do things differently.

“ You need expertise of the team to do periodic analysis to see if you have reached data saturation. Otherwise you carry on doing interviews without finding anything new and it becomes tokenistic (DP)

4.3 Consider peer researchers personal relationships to poverty and violence

Help unpick any misassumptions that arise during the research

One clear objective of PAC is to sustain a '*continued focus on reaching young people from less socio-economically affluent communities*' as well as retaining a focus on learning '*How to recruit and retain high risk and vulnerable young people in social action.*' DPs with a history of working with young people who are poorer and/or, young people at greater risk, and/or young people with personal experience of violence can use this effectively in recruitment, support and retention strategies. Other DPs should be open to their own need for learning and to reach out to YEF and other delivery partners as part of developing and honing recruitment, support and retention strategies.

Some young people from more affluent backgrounds will tend to view poverty, risk, and the experience of violence as overlapping issues which are more likely to be present in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage. Doing research on complex subjects, such as violence, involves dealing with discomfort as a researcher. The problem in these cases is that it leads to sympathetic responses which can create a dynamic of 'we feel sorry for you', which can interrupt research relationships.

Peer Researcher: Do you think that like any groups of certain young people are more or less at risk of youth violence?

Young Person being interviewed: Um I think I think it's more like cos I want to say boys in like really like rough areas, that's lower class areas cos it's like is not that they've got nothing better to do. But like they all just come together and they just like basically cause trouble because like just why not.

Peer Researcher Many unfortunate things are going on in our neighbourhoods every day.

Make use of and maintain the safe spaces created during induction

Peer researchers should be supported in embracing differences regarding their own and others lived experiences. For example, one PR described growing up '*in a small village with a different take on life...academic and well spoken, but clueless*' compared to the experiences of fellow peer researchers and recognised that through discussing such differences they were able to bring different and complementary skills to their work: '*I talk and bring things together. I've got the skill but not the content.*'

Peer researchers have all honed skills in dealing with difference, discrimination and hierarchy (gender, race, age, neurodiversity, class, ESFL) in this project and many young people have developed confidence in undertaking research and holding space with their peers.

Discuss and embrace singular and overlapping issues of difference, discrimination and hierarchy which have emerged in different ways throughout the project.

Rather than hierarchy, difference can be used as a resource:

PR: I think I've found at times it quite, I think with me being one of the older peer researchers. I found that quite difficult in terms of feeling like patronised a bit. or maybe like my age hasn't sort of been utilised perhaps the way it could have been.

Learning Partner: How old are you?

PR: So I'm 25. Yeah so I'm up there in terms of age and so sometimes I felt like I've been trapped like I'm 16 which I've found quite tricky to mediate at times I think especially with of my job and my career I found it really difficult being an adult professional woman but then treated like I'm 16. I have found that quite disempowering at times actually.

Cocreate a safety plan

This can help establish spaces in which having difficult conversations can become central to the research, and to ensure triggers can be worked around.

For example, some researchers experienced hostility in research settings, when black and brown peer researchers working in a predominantly white area were made to feel unwelcome, built a strategy of supporting their peers. Young people in the PAC forum cocreated a resource on having difficult conversations.

DPs must reflect critically on their own skills and histories of working with high risk young people

Some form of analysis (e.g. SWOT) may help at the outset. Peer researchers should be supported to reflect on their own differences and to deal with difference and discrimination and must be supported to hold difficult conversations which are intrinsic to researching subjects such as violence.

4.4 Maximise young people's decision making about their studies and social action

Explain the role of the 'higher ups'.

It is important for peer researchers that expectations around their role, and the role of 'higher ups' supporting them throughout the research and social action phases is set out clearly from the beginning.

Ensure that roles between peer researchers and any professionals supporting them are clearly defined and followed throughout projects

It is acknowledged that tensions can exist between supporting peer researchers' autonomy whilst feeling pressures to meet targets and move forward. To manage these tensions DPs and peer researchers have found it effective to name them. This means that DPs and peer researchers can work collaboratively, particularly when decisions about how to move forward are made. This way, peer researchers are more likely to feel that decision making is a democratic process:

“ Most of our decision-making is a collaborative effort, and in situations where we have conflicting views over

how best to move forward, we try to be as democratic as possible.

If roles are clearly defined, tensions around power relations between adult workers and peer researchers are less likely to occur

This can facilitate peer researchers' empowerment in their role. For example, peer researchers in one DP reflected on the role of 'higher ups' as providing the structures (i.e., staffing and funding) to enable them to 'actually do this':

“ ... funding and staffing... it then has to go on to like our coordinator and then director and stuff...I guess the higher ups have the power to actually make it happen, but it comes from the PR researchers... and them the ones actually doing this.

Decision making can be PR led rather than shared with DPs

Peer researchers' leadership and decision making are encouraged and facilitated when adult workers alongside them encourage peer researchers to communicate their preferences through group and one-to-one sessions and discussions where the decision comes back to the group:

“ ...we all share the power 'cause it's like we wanna do this, but we'll speak to [worker] like; “we've all agreed on this, how would we go about this?” and [worker] would advise us...she makes us think about it...but she never like stops us ...And then from that, then we [peer researchers] decide if we wanna go forward with it.

Maximising peer researchers' ability to make decisions and govern their social action research can be empowering. This can have important longer-term impacts:

“ I've learnt...I need to kind of be assertive in terms of like my experience...who I am...I need to assert my capabilities and experience and my potential...not let other people disempower me.

4.5 Scaling social action to reach across from personal to social (micro, mezzo and macro) levels

Support peer researchers to develop sociological as well as personal understandings of violence at the start of the programme, thinking from the personal to the social

People's experience and understanding of violence was quite varied from person to person. Throughout the programme many peer researchers reported an increase in their own awareness of personal experiences of youth violence, as well as its structural and systemic causes.

“ During the project I already knew about, like the violence within CITY, but maybe not so much where it stemmed from.”

Some suggested that more learning and shared exploration of the subject of violence at the start of the programme would help.

“ a training session at the start, on what is violence and who does what at a local level. This would really help with understanding the broader context of violence and how it is addressed”

This advice was also repeated by a DP:

“ The It was important to identify the systems that feed the cycle of violence and what is wrong in those systems and what change is needed in those systems. If

we cannot affect the system and inform that then maybe our research question is wrong. (DP)

Build in time for analysis

This is so that young people have the time to question the underlying causes of some of the concerns that are reported to them.

This can mean more time for analysis locally and time for cross case analysis with young people from other areas.

Reflecting together helps peer researchers and DPs develop an understanding of the need for strategic and systemic solutions to violence

This can help throughout the programme. For example, “the difficult history between the police and some Black and ethnic minority communities” was raised as an important issue, but one which would require long-term strategic solutions based on multi-agency partnership working.

When asked to reflect on their successes in social action many peer researchers chose to discuss moments when they felt they had changed the view of one young person in a workshop or discussion group.

Peer researchers learn how to do social action through practice that starts early

Some peer researchers and DPs have highlighted how learning more about social action earlier in the process would have helped. It is a strength of the programme that people have learned how hard it is to achieve social change, but it is a limitation that young people are learning through action too late in the process. Young people will benefit from engaging in social action before their research study, so that they can learn by doing, and draw that learning into future strategies for campaigning with their own data.

Our PRs developed a good understanding of how to implement a local project, but maybe didn't understand how to influence policy. If this was part of the training that would really help. Social action is really broad – it could be anything from a litter pick to an awareness campaign to a round table ... not everyone realized,

achieving impact through a campaign can take years.
(DP)

Some young people did not understand that campaigns are a form of social action. We recommend using the typology that we have developed through this study to help young people think through what they could do in social action and to develop messages from their research that encourage action and change in as many of these areas as possible:

- young people's behaviour in relation to violence
- adult stakeholder understanding of the issues and needs
- community/service provision
- community behaviour
- policy or strategy
- a social movement for change on these issues

How to recruit changemakers

- **Relationship building**- icebreakers, notice what is going on for them, friendly conversations, make changemakers feel included and talk about common themes
- **Contact** - stay in touch with them outside of session times
- **Induction** - introduce important themes early on
- **Consistency** - even if numbers are low, have a regular time when you always meet
- **Flexibility** - have a session plan - but be free to go off that and respond to what is going on; don't be upset if it goes haywire
- **Network** - link people into your networks and networks outside of your PAC group so that the action continues after the PAC project
- **Time** - we need more time to do this!
- **Reviewing** plans for future changemaker recruiting in terms of motive, payment, timelines, and the relative opportunity-costs of drawing additional young people into the process

5. COLLABORATIVE AND CUSHIONING RELATIONSHIPS

This section of the report features six essential areas to consider for the delivery level organizations working in localities as they support young people to deliver Peer Research/Social Action focused on youth violence. In our model, young people are employed in roles as peer researchers for a time limited period.

5.1 Smooth functioning relationships between peer researchers and support staff

Peer researchers value a key person from the DP with whom they could form a trusting relationship

This person could become knowledgeable about the PR, their context and background, and their research. This relationship provided a *cushion* from the pressures of the role and other challenges in the PR's life as the research progressed.

Peer researchers valued these relationships and reflected on the importance of being offered regular consistent one-to-one sessions

This provided a safe space in which their holistic needs could be explored together:

“ It's giving me confidence in knowing that I am moving in the right direction, and it also just makes sure that I'm doing everything as good as I can, so I know that I'm at the right stage or I'm doing things correctly.

Forming trusting and supportive relationships with key adults provided a sense of support and partnership

This meant peer researchers felt “*I never feel like I’m on my own*” and “*you’re not going it alone*”:

“ So, I have a one to one with him every month. and more frequently if I need it. It’s just to make sure everything’s fine in our personal life as well as work. And so that made like a good connection with him, so I felt like I talked to him about anything.

It is important that the person offering the one-to-one support is willing and able to be an ally to the PR

This means having an ability to reflect with the PRs and coaching skills, and committing to building a relationship, acting as a critical friend about the research work:

“ But she also asks us questions on why we wanna do that. So, she makes us think about it and to see if it’s worth doing. But she never like stops us in our places.

Having someone to “*stand behind*” peer researchers through the project was important

The peer researchers wanted the ownership and accountability for their research and the work they were undertaking but felt that a relationship with a key person who could supportively “*push*” them. For some peer researchers this key person provided them additional support during difficult research tasks or when they had anxieties about aspects of the role. Important in these circumstances was for that key worker to support and help the peer researcher to learn aspects of the role by doing things together:

“ To help ease her into it I suggested that we work as a pair, we could split the session between us, and I would be there to help deliver if she got stuck on her bits. She felt much happier with this but was still very anxious. Last week we delivered the session to a group of 7 girls who meet regularly. I started the introductions and then

the Peer Researcher began asking questions and delivering activities. They did an amazing job and were a natural! (DP)

Key to this relationship was knowing the PR's world inside and outside of the research project to enable personalised support

Supporting peer researchers to manage pressures of deadlines, and advocating on their behalf when adjustments need to be made to deadlines because of personal circumstances, was a key part of this role. Several peer researchers were accessing formal education and/or other forms of employment whilst undertaking their research, creating periods of increased pressure. Peer researchers valued the support in helping them balance work, home and school life and providing a buffer during periods where they had competing priorities on their time, such as during school exams. This key person also was important in helping peer researchers navigate the work around cultural and religious events such as when fasting and providing support where there were language barriers.

In some circumstances peer researchers were provided with support from different people with the host organisations/DPs. This enabled peer researchers to have autonomy in who they chose to develop supportive relationships with but could lead to distance between sources of help and the day to day project activities.

5.2 Working collaboratively in a trauma-informed way

Peer researchers and adults working with them need to adopt a trauma-informed approach

This involves supporting peer researchers and changemakers to identify potential triggers and trauma involved in the research role and put in place actions to support the peer researcher.

Some peer researchers have highlighted that they have previous experiences of crime and violence in their own lives. Experiences during research work that elicited strong emotions were common in peer

researchers' reflections. One peer researcher shared how they had experienced racism within their own school setting and when planning for a visit to a school they were conscious of this and how they approached it:

“ I went into that session with a bit of trauma, because when I was younger, I had to move schools because of racism. Going into that area, being myself and being professional. I went in as a girl who wears a hijab. You can see I am a Muslim.

Be aware of each individual's unique experiences and be able to proactively support them

This is a responsibility of the adults supporting young people. In some projects, DPs provided safe spaces for peer researchers monthly, using a trauma informed approach to process things that they had experienced in the research work that may have been a trigger for them. Also useful was providing spaces/sessions after research work (e.g., reflective interviews and focus groups) to discuss events and express feelings relating to their experiences. It is also important that support is sensitive to individual needs, for example, giving time out and space to “*regroup and rest*”.

Whilst it was important to provide support to enable time and space to process events following research, peer researchers also felt that **training relating to self-care and handling sensitive information was important** prior to conducting research work to ensure “*feeling prepared before we do things*”.

5.3 Supportive relationships with Peer Researchers in the same project

Opportunities to meet for mutual support and/or socialising with other peer researchers

As noted in section 3.2, this was an opportunity for reflection but also had an important *cushioning* role for them too throughout the project. Commonly discussed by peer researchers was the value of meeting with

other peer researchers and regularly the phrase *being part of a family* came up in their reflections. Peer researchers valued their interactions with their peers and gained support and confidence from being with and working together with other peer researchers. For some meeting with other peer researchers was their favourite part of their experience.

Collaborative relationships are built when peers were able to provide both emotional and practical support through the programme

This meant "*support[ing] each other through the highs and the lows*", discussing a feeling that "*the whole community helps if one of us is struggling*". Peer researchers also provided mutual support when they had negative experiences during data collection, some reflecting that "*talking about it with other peers is enough*".

Where small groups or pairs of peer researchers were working on similar research topics, forming working groups was seen as valuable

This was "*so they were able to sort of work together and share methodology and bounce off each other*". Peer researchers found support from other peer researchers and would have conversations to share what had happened within their interviews. The group meetings with peer researchers also provided opportunities for peers to celebrate their successes:

" I feel the more experience I have the more confident I can be. Also, the cool thing about it everyone has done their first interview, we do a proper celebration. And share it in the chat.

Be mindful of peer researcher's family, school and work commitments and not to over burden with lots of meetings

Not all peer researchers felt that meeting with their peers was necessary, particularly in relation to social events, some found them “*tokenistic*”, “*boring*” or “*childish*”. Thus, an individualized and task centered approach to peer researchers’ meetings is necessary.

5.4 Forming collaborative relationships with peer researchers nationally

Peer researchers value the opportunity to engage and interact with other peer researchers nationally

This provided them with an opportunity to gain insight into the work of others and supportively challenge peer researchers allowing them the space to question and develop their own research. The peer researchers welcomed the opportunity to make connections and friendships with peer researchers nationally across the project, providing them with a sense of belonging within the wider collective:

“ It gave me the opportunity to see PAC from a different perspective, as a big movement across the country. I was able to meet many peer researchers and share our experiences but also make a lot of friends.

Support PRs to engage with a residential early on in the programme

This can bring multiple benefits as young people reported how much they gained from it:

“ It expanded our idea of the work, gave us some new perspectives which were different to our own. People were considering homophobia and racism whereas our analysis was more general and after this we looked at other problems and we saw how these were issues here too.

5.5 Establishing collaborative relationships with the programme and Delivery Partners

Recognise that building DP relationships across the country with others involved in the programme can help build new understanding

This understanding of each other's projects and experiences provided a space for sharing practice. Many DPs valued these opportunities to work together to "*collectively troubleshoot and resolve the complexities involved in the delivery of this project*". Talking at formal and informal events helped to develop a community of practice which enabled sharing of ideas, experiences, and reflections. Seeing that others had similar issues "*took the pressure off*" and it was "*comforting to know that others are facing the same struggles*".

Advice and experience exchange

Exchanging resources that DPs or PRs have created can build relationships as DPs share practice and start to identify who might have expertise in which area. A combination of face to face and online meetings throughout the programme creates the best blend for building collaborative relationships.

5.6 Building relationships with research participants/changemakers

Peer researchers valued the support of the Delivery Partners in recruiting research participants and change makers

Some peer researchers were able to recruit young people within the DP organisation or with other organisations that the Delivery Partners had

existing relationships with "*capitalising on their trusted relationships*".

One peer researcher reflected that local young people saw them as insiders and this helped the community to discuss important local issues:

" We aren't scary uniforms approaching with scary questions, we are young people in casual clothes, here to listen to where things have gone wrong.

Peer researchers and Delivery Partners said that **developing youth work and creative skills to build relationships between the peer researchers and changemakers was important**, but not always easy. One delivery partner created a space for peer researchers and changemakers to meet face to face for a 'brainstorming session' which gave the changemakers the "*opportunity to ask where the project comes from and for peer researchers to say, 'this is why we're doing it'*".